

The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing

STRATEGIES, STRUCTURES, AND SOLUTIONS

Judy Davis • Sharon Hill

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann

A division of Reed Elsevier, Inc.
361 Hanover St.
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

© 2003 by Judy Davis and Sharon Hill

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review, with the following exceptions: Appendices A–U may be photocopied for classroom use only.

The authors and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

“Dragonfly” from *Creatures of Earth, Sea, and Sky: Poems* by Georgia Heard. Published by Boyds Mill Press (1997). Reprinted by permission of Georgia Heard.

“My Grandmother’s Hair” by Cynthia Rylant. Copyright © 1991 by Cynthia Rylant. Reprinted by permission of the author.

“October Saturday” by Bobbi Katz. Copyright © 1990 by Bobbi Katz. Reprinted by permission.

“Too Much” from *TIME for Kids* (January 29, 1999). Reprinted by permission.

“The World of a Child in an Old Chair” by Hank Lubsen. Copyright © 1995 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted by permission.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Davis, Judy (Judy A.)

The no-nonsense guide to teaching writing : strategies, structures, and solutions / Judy Davis,
Sharon Hill.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-325-00521-4 (alk. paper)

1. English language—Composition and exercises—Study and teaching (Elementary)—United States.

I. Hill, Sharon (Sharon E.) II. Title.

LB1576.D2373 2003

372.62'3—dc21

2003010359

Editor: Lois Bridges

Production management: Patricia Adams

Production coordination: Abigail M. Heim

Typesetting: David Stirling, Black Dog Graphics; Gina Poirier, Gina Poirier Design

Design coordination: Renée Le Verrier

Interior design: Jenny Jensen Greenleaf

Photographs: Donnelly Marks

Cover design: Catherine Hawkes, Cat and Mouse

Manufacturing: Steve Bernier

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

07 06 05 04 03 EB 1 2 3 4 5

Contents

Foreword	xi
Acknowledgments	xiii
Introduction	xviii

PART 1 **Getting a Handle on the Essentials:** GOALS, TOOLS, AND MANAGEMENT

Chapter 1: Setting Achievable Goals 3

Goals for Our Student Writers	3
Goals for Ourselves as Teachers	4
Goals for Student Writing	5

Chapter 2: Using the Right Tools 7

Tools That Serve the Students	7
The Writer's Notebook	7 • Mentor Texts 10 • Magazines and Newspapers 10 • Writing Partnerships and Response Groups 11 • Editing Checklists 12 • Student Assessments 14 • Dual-Pocket Folders 15 • Portfolio Binders 15 • Writing Supplies 15
Tools That Serve the Teacher	16
Planning Sheets	16 • Conference Sheets 16 • Teacher Writing 17

Chapter 3: Providing Structure and Organization 19

Writing Across the Curriculum	19
Writing Cycles	21
Genre Studies	23
The Writing Day	24
Minilessons: What and Why	24 • Minilessons: How 25 • Minilessons: Across the Process 27 • Conferences: What and Why 30 • Conferences: How 31 • Conferring Across the Process 32 • Share Time—Why and How 35



Chapter 4: Setting Up the Writing Workshop 36

Providing a Writing Environment 36

Keeping Up with Notebooks 38

Keeping the Workshop Running Smoothly 39

Supporting the Workshop Through Ongoing Rituals 40

Homework 40 • Weekend Assessment 41 • The Class Journal 41
• The Personal Thesaurus 43 • The Poetry Anthology 44

PART 2 Helping Your Students Become Writers

Chapter 5: First Cycle: From Writing Idea to Notebook Entry 51

Getting Started with Thoughtful Planning 51

Introducing the Notebook 54

Building Inspiration 54 • Using “Flip Pads” (Temporary Notebooks) 55 • Drawing Stories from Our Memory Banks 55
• Drawing Stories from Literature 56 • Sharing Our Writing Histories 58 • *Minilessons: Writing Histories* 59 • Personalizing the Writer’s Notebooks 59 • *Minilessons: Making the Notebook Your Own* 60

Introducing Writing in the Notebooks 60

Stirring Up Stories Through Literature 60 • *Minilessons: Literature Links* 62 • Reliving Family Stories 63 • *Minilessons: Family Stories* 63 • Drawing Inspiration from Photographs 63 • *Minilessons: Photographs* 64 • Taking an “Expert” Inventory 64 • *Minilessons: Expert Inventory* 66 • Differentiating Notebook and Diary Entries 66 • *Minilessons: Diary Versus Notebook* 67 • Freewriting 68 • *Minilessons: Freewriting* 68 • Recording Observations 68 • *Minilessons: Paying Attention to What We Observe* 69 • Learning from the Work of Others 69 • *Minilessons: Drawing from Others’ Work* 70

Highlighting Student Work 71

Chapter 6: Teaching What Your Students Need 73

Highlighting Student Work 74

Minilessons: Helping Writers Who Have Multiple Ideas in One Notebook Entry 77 • *Minilessons: Helping Writers Who Tell Their Stories Without Explaining (or Recognizing) Their Importance* 80

Troubleshooting 81



Chapter 7: Moving from Notebook Entry to Finished Piece 83

Choosing Ideas from the Notebook 84

Minilessons: Reasons for Choosing Something to Publish 84 • Predictable Problems 84

Developing Material Around an Idea 85

Minilessons: Strategies Students Might Use to Help Them Do This Work 85

Drafting 86

Minilessons: Drafting Strategies 86

Revision 88

Predictable Problems 88 • *Minilessons: Revision Through Reseeing* 89

Editing 89

Minilessons: Editing Skills 91 • Editing Outside the Writing Workshop 92 • Predictable Problems 92

Publishing 92

Writer's Reflection 93 • Celebrating the Work of Writers 93 • Creating Partnerships 95

Highlighting Student Work 96

Chapter 8: Future Cycles: Lifting the Quality of the Writing Notebook 99

Goals for Future Cycles 99

Broadening the Strategies for Gathering Ideas 100

Studying Mentor Texts 100 • Drawing Help from Powerful Poetry 102 • Using Magazines and Newspaper Articles 103 • The Notebook as a Tool for Gathering New Entries 104

Using Picture Books and Short Texts to Model Specific Writing Techniques 108

Minilessons: Using Literature to Inspire Writers 108

Using Literature to Practice Particular Styles of Writing 109

Highlighting Student Work 111

Minilessons: Helping Writers Stay Focused on an Entry and Develop One Idea 112 • *Minilessons: Helping Writers Develop Their Ideas* 115 • *Minilessons: Helping Writers Get to the Heart of Their Writing* 117

Deepening the Thought 118

Using Mentor Texts 118

Extending the Work to Student Writing 121

Minilessons: Developing Student Writing 121

Highlighting Student Work 123

Finding Issues That Influence Our Lives 125

Highlighting Student Work 126

Chapter 9: Mastering the Magic of Revision 128

Attending to the Mechanics 128

Focusing on the Content 129

Focusing on Craft 131

Goals of a Craft Study 131

Deciding Which Craft to Study 131 • Steps in a Craft Study 132

• *Minilessons: Craft Studies* 133

Conducting a Craft Study 133

Studying an Entire Text 133 • Studying a Specific Craft

Technique 135 • Studying Purpose/Effect Using Different

Techniques 136

Other Important Craft Studies 138

Studying How Writers Use Lists 138 • Studying Leads 139

Focusing on Structure 140

Focusing on Voice 142

Looking Beyond What We Know and Expect 142

Highlighting Student Work 144

PART 3 Extending Writing Possibilities**Chapter 10: Poetry Study 149**

Goals of This Study 150

Year-Long Supports 150

Phase 1: Immersion 151

What the Teacher Is Doing 151 • What the Students Are Doing 153

• The Result 153

Phase 2: Inquiry and Analysis 153

What the Teacher Is Doing 153 • What the Students Are Doing 154

• The Result 156

Phase 3: Moving Beyond the Comfort Zone 156

What the Teacher Is Doing 156 • What the Students Are Doing 157

• The Result 157

Phase 4: Drafting and Revising 159

What the Teacher Is Doing 159 • What the Students Are Doing 159

• The Result 161

Phase 5: Editing and Publishing 161

What the Teacher Is Doing 161 • What the Students Are Doing 161

• The Result 161

Highlighting Student Work 162

Chapter 11: Feature Article Study 165

What Are Feature Articles? 166

Goals of This Study 168

Phase 1: Immersion 168

What the Teacher Is Doing 168 • What the Students Are Doing 170

• The Result 170



Phase 2: Inquiry 170

What the Teacher Is Doing 170 • What the Students Are Doing 171
 • The Result 173

Phase 3: Developing an Idea 174

What the Teacher Is Doing 174 • What the Students Are Doing 174
 • The Result 174

Phase 4: Drafting 174

What the Teacher Is Doing 174 • What the Students Are Doing 175
 • The Result 175

Phase 5: Revising and Crafting 175

What the Teacher Is Doing 175 • What the Students Are Doing 176
 • The Result 176

Phase 6: Editing 176

What the Teacher Is Doing 176 • What the Students Are Doing 177
 • The Result 177

Phase 7: Publishing the Articles 177

What the Teacher Is Doing 177 • What the Students Are Doing 177
 • The Result 177

Highlighting Student Work 178**Chapter 12: Picture Book Study 181****Goals of This Study 181****Year-Long Supports 182****Phase 1: Immersion 182**

What the Teacher Is Doing 182 • What the Students Are Doing 185
 • The Result 186

Phase 2: Inquiry and Analysis 187

What the Teacher Is Doing 187 • What the Students Are Doing 187
 • The Result 187

Phase 3: Drafting/Envisioning the Structure of the Picture Book 189

What the Teacher Is Doing 189 • What the Students Are Doing 189
 • The Result 189

Phase 4: Revision 190

What the Teacher Is Doing 190 • What the Students Are Doing 190
 • The Result 190

Phase 5: Studying the Art and Editing the Text 192

What the Teacher Is Doing 192 • What the Students Are Doing 192
 • The Result 192

Phase 6: Publishing 193

What the Teacher Is Doing 193 • What the Students Are Doing 193
 • The Result 193

Highlighting Student Work 194**Chapter 13: Open-Choice Investigations 198****Goals of Open-Choice Investigations 198****Examples of Open-Choice Investigations 199**

Zack 199 • Oliver 200



Conclusion: When Writing Spills Out of the Writing Workshop 205

Afterword 209

Appendices 211

- A** Editing Checklist 212
- B** Student Weekend Writing Assessment 213
- C** Writer's Reflection 214
- D** Conference Recordkeeping Sheet 215
- E** Notebook Checklist 216
- F** Minilesson Planning Sheet 217
- G** Day-to-Day Minilesson Planning Sheet 218
- H** Flowchart: What I'm Trying to Say 219
- I** Craft Study 220
- J** Structure Templates 221
- K** Responding to Poetry 223
- L** Poetry Study Chart 224
- M** Knowing My Taste in Poetry 225
- N** Poetry Reflection 227
- O** Feature Article Study Chart 229
- P** From Notebook Entry to Feature Article 230
- Q** Feature Article Assessment 231
- R** Getting Inspired by a Good Picture Book 233
- S** Picture Book Study Chart 234
- T** Picture Book Assessment 235
- U** Open-Choice Investigation Topic Chart 237

Bibliography 239

Professional Books 239

Poetry Anthologies 240

Picture Books 241

Books Containing Short Texts 244

Index 245

Using the Right Tools

Having the right tools in the writer's workshop is crucial. By tools, we mean anything that supports the ongoing work of the writers in our classrooms. These tools fall into two overlapping categories:

1. Tools that serve the students
2. Tools that serve the teacher

Of course we've created something of a false dichotomy here for purposes of explanation. In reality, if a tool supports our students as writers, it simultaneously supports us as teachers of writers.

Tools That Serve the Students

The Writer's Notebook

A writer's notebook is a tool our students use to record the things they notice, observe, and think about. We call each recording an entry. The entries can be any variety of ideas. The most common that we see our students writing are:

- memories
- observations of the things happening around them
- descriptions of people and places important in their lives
- opinions
- wonderings
- wishes
- family stories, hobbies, and other passions

In other words, children write best about the things that are important to them. It is writing that comes from what they know and what they have experienced. For this reason, we usually discourage fantasy, mystery, or fairy tale writing. Instead, we encourage students to be in touch with what's going on in the world, by paying attention to the meaningful, everyday things that may otherwise go unnoticed and unrecorded.



BEGINNING THE WRITING NOTEBOOK

A writer's notebook can be a traditionally bound composition book or the fancier notebooks commonly found in stationery stores. We encourage students to personalize them with pictures or other artifacts that are meaningful to them. See Figure 2-1. We discourage the use of spiral notebooks because they tend to give the message that it is okay to tear out pages.

The important thing about choosing a notebook is that the pages are large enough to support plenty of writing per page as well as space in the margin for writing questions, jottings, and notes. When there is an expectation to fill the larger page, we have found the bigger the thinking becomes. Teaching toward “bigger thinking” is especially important for our more reluctant writers who tend to connect “writing more” with the quantity of lines rather than the quality of thought.

With an emphasis on “quality of thought,” we ask students to use only the left hand pages of the notebook for writing entries. The pages on the right are used as students reread their entries, providing space for them to write more. As they return to those entries, we teach students to use new strategies to develop their initial ideas. Such strategies may include getting a new idea from an old one, re-crafting an entry, using questioning to push their thinking, or adding more details to the entry. (Please see detailed minilessons in Chapter 8.) This right-hand space makes the notebook more conducive to this revisiting. Our expectation is that students will understand that their thinking may not necessarily be complete because they come to the end of an entry. The right-hand side is a constant reminder that there may be more thinking to be done on any given idea or topic.

The notebook also offers writers the freedom to conveniently collect ideas for writing. We encourage students to not only use it in school, but to see it as a place where they can capture their thoughts about anything at any time. So even though it is a requirement in school, as they begin to take ownership, our hope is that they begin to see it less as an assignment and more as a personal tool for writing about what's important to them.



FIGURE 2-1. *An array of notebooks.*

WHY USE A WRITER'S NOTEBOOK?

In her book *Writing Through Childhood*, Shelley Harwayne, our mentor and founding principal at The Manhattan New School, presents a powerful invitation when she introduces the notebook to children by asking them to “Imagine doing the kind of writing that you will want to save for a lifetime. When you are twenty, fifty, or eighty, you will still keep these beautiful bound books in a special place because you will always want to recall what kind of kid you were, what you paid attention to, and what you thought about when you were young.” After such an invitation, it’s not unusual to see students go away hugging their notebooks while teachers go away feeling confident that an invitation to students to keep a notebook is an invitation to live like writers—real writers who take time to notice their world and to write about it. See Figure 2–2.

The notebook is a manageable tool in which students keep an ongoing collection of writing. A bound notebook, as compared to a folder or binder, eliminates the worry of losing work and makes the work easily accessible. It houses ideas that writers can return to in order to grow ideas, restructure, rethink, revise, connect ideas, and ultimately choose from a variety of entries to publish for an audience. Our message is that we expect them to publish, and, with that in mind, the notebook is an important tool to support that work.

The following quotes from our students reflect their feelings about keeping a writer’s notebook:

“I think writing is like looking for treasure—ideas are everywhere.” Alexi

“My writer’s notebook is like a timeline of happenings and feeling that happened in my life. I think to myself, ‘When I grow up and look back at my notebook, I’ll know how I felt when I was a kid.’” Dana

“My writer’s notebook is like a long-lost relative. It tells the story of my life and my feelings.” Laura

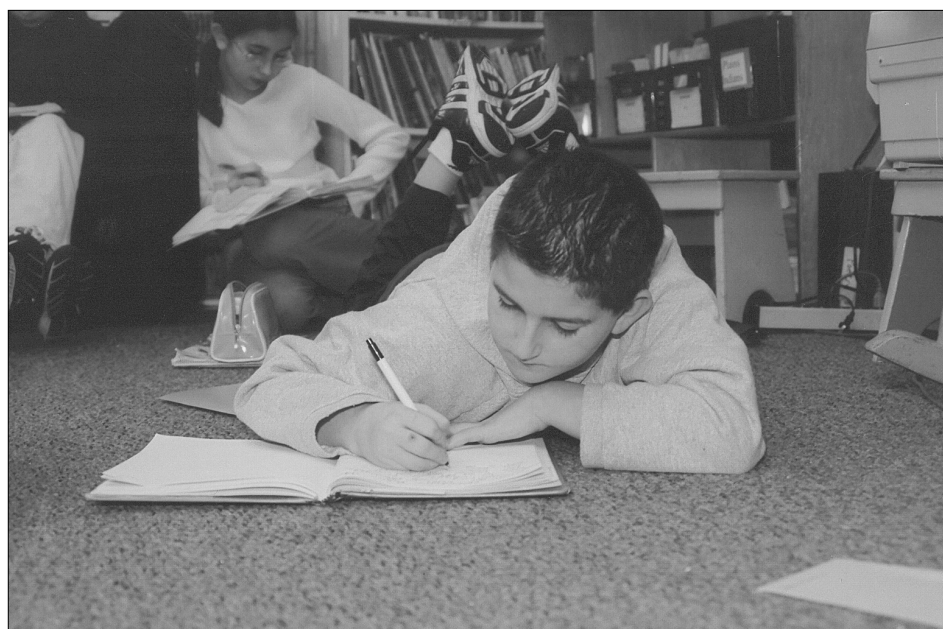


FIGURE 2–2. Sam on the floor writing in his notebook.

“My notebook is a carefree place to grow your thoughts and nurture your ideas. And there are no restrictions.” Luca

“I love my writer’s notebook because it goes on and on and writing is a never ending subject.” Julie

“I like using a writer’s notebook because it’s so organized. I can look back on them and revise or I can leave them the way they are.” Nina

Mentor Texts

Shelley not only valued the writer’s notebook as a tool for nurturing student writing but also deeply understood that one of the most important tools we use as teachers of writing is literature. When we set out to learn to do anything, we look to others who are expert at what we are trying to learn to do. Learning to write is no different. In teaching our students to be good writers, one of the first things we want them to be able to do is to anchor themselves to authors and texts they admire. A “mentor piece” is a short text or portion of a text used as a support for the work we are trying to accomplish in the workshop. Most of these pieces are read aloud or shared using the overhead projector. When possible, multiple copies of these are also made available for easy reference. We keep them in labeled baskets around the room so they are readily accessible. Very often, our students’ published writing will become mentor pieces for other writers in the class. After pieces are published, we put them in plastic sleeves and set them in baskets so students can read each other’s work when they need support or we can refer to them in a conference.

What we look for when choosing a mentor text:

- The topic is one the kids can relate to and will spark ideas for their own writing.
- The text not only tells a story, but also addresses an underlying issue that children will be able to readily uncover and write about in relation to their own lives.
- The text is well written and provides many opportunities to teach the qualities of good writing.
- The text is written in a specific genre we are focusing on in a genre study.

As students become more proficient writers with clear intentions for their writing, we expect that students will continue to refer to the mentor pieces we have chosen, as well as seek out published writers on their own for support.

By surrounding ourselves with possible mentor texts, we become informed about which ones will best serve our students’ needs. After some practice, we seem to know the right ones when we see them.

Magazines and Newspapers

We order magazine subscriptions to *Time for Kids* and *Junior Scholastic* for each of our students and weave them into lessons throughout the year. We find these timely articles help broaden the possibilities for ideas to write about. Newspapers are also subscribed to and used regularly throughout the year.

Writing Partnerships and Response Groups

We would like to meet the needs of all of our students at all times, but the reality of our 30-student classrooms makes it almost impossible. What we can do, however, is set up structures that allow us to manage this task of providing support: writing response groups and writing partnerships. These structures help students realize that the teacher is not the only source they can turn to for help. As shown in Figure 2–3, they can rely on each other for support. Of course, informal pairings frequently occur and are encouraged after minilessons for students to process the strategy learned in the minilesson and talk about the writing work they will do that day. This quick discussion with a neighbor is getting them ready for the work they might do later in a more structured partnership. There are many different ways for forming partnerships and response groups. They include:

Permanent Writing Partner

- The person who reviews your weekly writing and comes to know your notebook work very well. This partnership should be formed based on the supports one writer in the group can give to the other. Since it takes time to get to know the writers in your class, early partnerships are most often formed based on what you notice about work habits. Once you get to know the students better, you can be more informed in creating alliances and base partnerships on writer's strengths and needs.

Writing Focus Partnership

- This arrangement is usually formed by simply saying to a student, “I think you need to talk to Jennifer. She is an expert at what you are trying to do, I know she will help you.”



FIGURE 2–3. A writing response group.

Study Groups to Research Some Aspect of Writing

- Two or more children work toward a similar goal and come together to research, support each other's attempts, and share their knowledge of an area of writing they may be studying.

Response Groups

- Students get together in small groups to share their writing and provide feedback that supports the work the writer is attempting to do.

Editing Checklists

We want our writers to understand the difference between writing and editing. Although we do not want them to be bogged down with spelling, punctuation, or proper sentence structure during the process of getting their ideas down in the notebook or in a draft, we do want them to understand that properly edited writing is what we ultimately expect. We use an editing checklist, shown in Figure 2–4, to help our stu-

Editing Checklist

SPELLING

1. I have found misspelled words and tried spelling them in the margin.

TRICKY WORDS

2. I have checked to see if I used the correct homophone.

• there, their, they're	• to, too, two
• your, you're	• weather, whether
• used to	• past, passed
• which, witch	• except, accept
• then, than	• its, it's
• could have	

DOES IT MAKE SENSE?

3. I have reread my work to make sure I have not left out any words I intended to write.

4. I have checked to make sure my sentences are not too long. If they were, I have either rephrased them or made them into more than one sentence.

PUNCTUATION

5. I have placed **periods, commas, questions marks,** and **exclamation marks** in places where they belong.

6. I began each sentence with an uppercase letter.

7. I have used **uppercase** letters for names of people, places, and proper nouns.

8. I have indented each new paragraph as my thoughts shifted.

FIGURE 2–4. *Editing checklist.*

dents become more accustomed to rereading their work with a lens toward editing, we need it to become a ritual, something they do on a regular basis. We copy an editing checklist for each student and laminate it. Students clip them to the right side of their notebooks, moving it along from page to page as they would a bookmark. The margin of each left-hand side of the notebook is marked with the numbers 1 to 8, to coincide with the tasks on the checklist. Each time the students write, they go back to reread their work, checking for each of the items on the checklist and making the appropriate changes. In the case of spelling, they use the margin for attempts at spelling the word correctly. They check off each completed task in the margin. (See Figure 2–5.) When we take notebooks home to read, we also look to see how students are working with the checklist and talk to them about it during our regular conferences. After a few cycles of this work, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure in the notebook are notice-

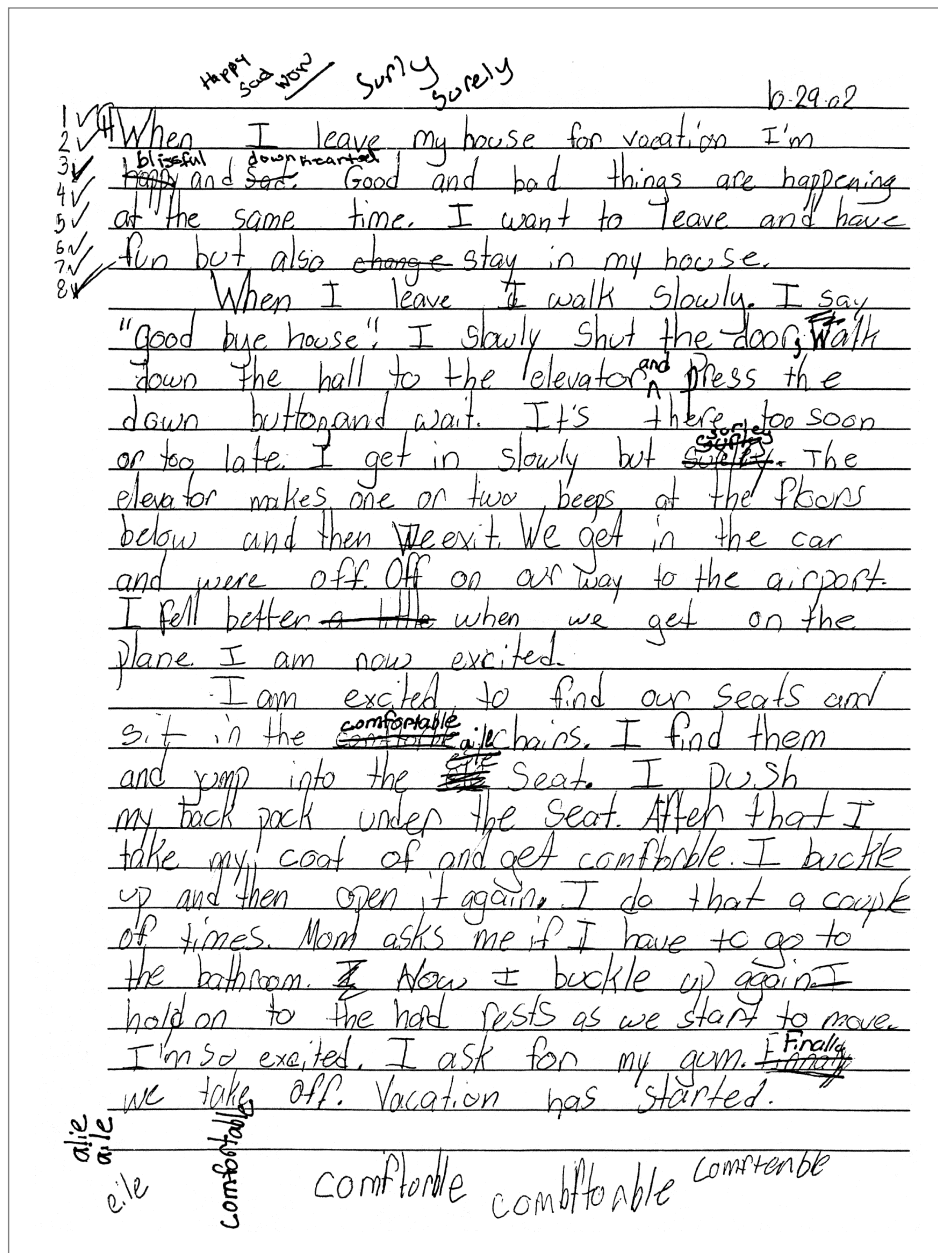


FIGURE 2–5. Alex's notebook page.

ably better, and when students are editing a piece to be published, they tend to catch more of their own errors and errors when they edit their partner's work. (See Figures 2-4 and 2-5 and Appendices A, B, and E.)

Student Assessments

Taking time to reflect on their writing is part of the process that helps students grow as writers and thinkers. While the mentor piece provides a model of good writing, the assessment provides an opportunity for reflecting over their commitment to writing during the previous week and for setting goals for the coming week. For this purpose we have designed a weekly assessment that students complete each weekend (see Figure 2-6 and Appendix B) of the collecting stage of every cycle. On

STUDENT WEEKEND WRITING ASSESSMENT

Name Alex Week of 11/11/02

Reflecting on the goal I set last week, I can say I did a pretty good job. I really made sure I read them aloud to my self. There were a lot of things wrong. Since I read my entries aloud I was able to fix the mistakes.

This week:

☒ I have written at least 6-8 entries.

☒ Each of my entries are at least one page long.

☒ I edit my entry each night when I am finished writing.

☒ I have at least three different types of entries. (memories, observations, opinions etc)

☒ I have added at least two new writing ideas to my "Things I Can Write About" list.

☒ I have worked on improving my writing. I worked on thinking about how strong verbs and realistic comparisons can make my writing better.

☒ I have reread my entries and have found at least one new idea from an old one.

☒ I have written more thoughtfully about something I have written about before.

☒ I have shared my writing with someone else and have carefully considered their feedback.

☒ I have written at least one entry off an article I read in *Time for Kids* or *Junior Scholastic* or any other magazines or newspapers I have read.. (wonderings, opinions, questions)

I am using this coming week to focus on writing three different types of entries. I am writing different types of entries. Mostly everything I can relate to, my family. That's what I do. I will try not to make many entries on my family.

I plan to do this by:

☒ speaking with peers ☐ conferring with teacher ☐ finding a mentor piece

Parent's Signature Michelle Peer Signature John D.

FIGURE 2-6. Weekly Assessment—Alex's filled-in sheet.

Monday morning we ask students to share their assessment work with a partner. They are not only being held accountable for doing the work but insuring they have an additional pair of eyes, aside from the teacher's, to give feedback and suggestions for achieving their goal.

After students have published, there is a Writer's Reflection assessment. This requires students to comment on what they have learned as they moved through the process from notebook entry to published piece, and asks them to reflect on their learning and how it will carry over to all future writing they do. See Figure 7–7k and Appendix C.

The students keep these assessments in their writing folder. At the end of each writing cycle, all assessments are removed from the writing folders and transferred to the writing sections of their portfolios. Before each marking period, we must meet with students individually to review their assessments and our conference notes and to talk about accomplishments and set goals.

Dual-Pocket Folders

To help organize the Writing Workshop, we ask that the students keep all loose papers in a plastic dual-pocket folder that we purchase for them at the beginning of the year. We collect the money from the parents later on. Parents are delighted to have us take the responsibility of ordering supplies since we can buy them much cheaper by ordering a large quantity from a local stationery supplier. Of course this is in the best of all possible worlds. Certainly you can buy less costly folders that you purchase from local vendors or ask students to buy them as part of their school supplies. When the folders begin to look shabby by the middle of the year, replace them in the same way. On one side of a folder the students keep copies of excerpts from mentor pieces we are using for that cycle and the current issues of the magazines. On the other side, the students keep the weekly assessment and any writing drafts they are currently working on.

Portfolio Binders

In addition to the folder, each student has a portfolio binder containing dividers labeled with each academic subject area. This three-ring binder is meant to display their growth over time in each academic area. We will deal only with the contents of the writing section here. For each published piece of writing, there is a cover sheet. We copy these on different-colored paper so that the reader can know when the work of one cycle is complete and a new published piece begins. This introduces the piece that follows and explains what it is about and why it is included in the portfolio. Next comes the published piece of writing, then the notebook entry/entries from which the piece originated, the drafts, and finally, the assessment that reflects on the work the writer did for that publishing cycle.

Writing Supplies

In order to establish an environment that supports our young writers, we make sure that each table is equipped with a basket that contains a supply of pens, pencils, staplers, tape, sticky notes, glue sticks, and paper. In order for our students to be

engaged in the work of writing, it is important that the lack of tools does not become an issue. The baskets are always out and available. We assign the responsibility of keeping them stocked to students.

Tools That Serve the Teacher

Organization is the key to a smooth-running classroom. We have emphasized the importance of the availability of tools for our students. It is also true for us as teachers. It is of utmost importance, particularly during minilessons and conferences, to have easy access to markers, chart tablets, overhead projectors, sticky notes, and texts. The flow of a minilesson should never be interrupted because tools are unavailable or not conveniently placed.

Planning Sheets

We have already written about the need for teachers to plan. We know we must have a vision of where we need to begin in September and where we want our students to be in June. When Jacqui Getz succeeded Shelley Harwayne as principal of The Manhattan New School, she inspired in us a greater urgency to develop thoughtful, realistic plans based on the expectations and standards put in place by our state curriculum, district mandate, school philosophy, and colleagues on our grade level. Long-term plans must be put in place before we can plan the minilessons necessary to carry out our day-to-day goals in service of meeting those long-range plans.

In order to help us scaffold that work, Jacqui helped us design a number of different planning sheets that help hold us accountable for the work we have set out to do in each cycle. (See Figures 5–1, 5–2, and Appendices F and G.) Although each cycle is planned—knowing where we will start, where we will end, and when we will end—we are constantly taking cues from our students and allowing our conferences to inform our minilessons. This allows us to be flexible enough to rethink our plans so that we are stepping in tune with the needs of our students. This means allowing teachable moments to take over and slowing down when our students are not ready to move on.

Whether you consider using the planning sheets included in this book, adapt them to fit your own needs, or use ones you have created that suit you better, the point is, you *must* plan. A wise principal in our district prominently displays this sign pinned to her bulletin board: *“If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.”*

Conference Sheets

When we sit down to conference with a student, we have all the necessary tools with us. We carry sticky notes, a text or two that might help us model a strategy for the writers we plan to confer with that day and, of course, our recordkeeping materials. (See Figure 2–7, and also Figures 6–7, 6–10 and Appendix D.) Many of the writing teachers we know who have been at this for some time have tried many different forms of conference sheets. Keep in mind that it is not so much the format of the sheets you use, although easy reference is always a key factor, but that you do keep the records and do refer to them. The recordings about particular students not only

help with the work you do with that child, but inform your teaching and help you design your minilessons accordingly. The conference sheet we have included not only provides easy reference for each child in the class, but a space for us to make quick notes on ideas for minilessons based on our observations. In September, we design these sheets, filling in each student's name, then photocopy and bind a quantity into a portable, spiral bound book that we can carry with us to jot notes in as we move around the room conferring with our students about their writing progress. Seeing all the boxes in front of us helps keep us honest. If, during the course of a writing cycle, we see that there are particular boxes blank, we cannot in good conscience ignore the fact that we haven't yet conferred with a particular student. Our goal, of course, is to get to as many students as many times during a cycle as possible.

Teacher Writing

We have mentioned before how much we value opportunities to bring our own experiences as readers and writers to help enrich our teaching. When we share our writing with our students, we are not only giving them a glance into our lives as literate adults, we are modeling the experience of writing and the process of writing. Sometimes we purposely compose a piece of writing that will help us accomplish the goal we have in mind for our students. Other times, we simply select appropriate entries from our notebooks. Over the course of time, we keep returning to these pieces of writing for different purposes.

WRITING CYCLE _____

<i>Aaron</i>	<i>Alex</i>	<i>Amanda</i>	<i>Anthony</i>	<i>Natasha</i>	<i>Nina</i>	<i>Oliver</i>	<i>Rachel</i>
<i>Aaron</i>	<i>Alex</i>	<i>Amanda</i>	<i>Anthony</i>	<i>Richard</i>	<i>Rilka</i>	<i>Sam A.</i>	<i>Sam W.</i>
<i>Gianpaolo</i>	<i>Hadley</i>	<i>Jacob</i>	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>Simon</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Toby</i>	<i>Zack B.</i>
<i>Julian</i>	<i>Julie</i>	<i>Kyla</i>	<i>Mike</i>	<i>Zack S.</i>	<i>Jian Rong</i>	<i>Minilessons</i>	

FIGURE 2-7. Blank Recordkeeping Sheet.

Sometimes we get together with colleagues on our grade level and each teacher will write a different type of entry for the purpose of demonstrating the different ways people might respond to a text. For instance, at the beginning of the year when we first began to use literature, we noticed that so many of our students would write entries directly related to the content of the text we had read. We got together with our colleagues and asked each of them to write entries after having heard the text, keeping in mind that they needed to push their thinking in order to demonstrate for students some possibilities of where our minds can take us. We shared the entries with our students and identified the different ways in which different teachers were inspired to write. We named the strategies and taught them to use those strategies in their own writing. At other times, we have carefully chosen entries from our notebooks, circled the part of the writing that we would like to work on to accomplish a particular goal, and, through a shared writing minilesson, demonstrated what we wanted our students to practice with their own writing.

As you read further into this book, we will explain in greater detail how we use our own writing to help students develop trains of thoughts, to help them dig deeper into memories and family stories, and how we help students master a variety of writing strategies.